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AN ENGLISH EQUIVALENT OF "COMBINATIONS-METHODE"

THE recent death of Professor Ebbinghaus has again called my attention to the fact that it has become quite a habit among English-speaking psychologists to translate his "Combinations-methode" of testing intellectual functions by "combination method." I wish to call attention to the fact that this is in no sense a translation of the term used by Ebbinghaus. The German words "Combination, combinieren," have all the meanings of the English words *combination* and *to combine*; but the German words have an additional meaning which in English is entirely lacking. An example may serve to make this clear. If we say in German that a man possesses "Combinationsgabe," this means that he has a talent for drawing conclusions from premises which do not very readily present themselves to a man's consciousness as items of a unitary logical thought, but which, *as soon as they are combined*, suggest the conclusion very forcefully. Now, the English word *combination* has no such meaning, and therefore, *Combinationsgabe* can not be translated talent for combination. That English-speaking psychologists have failed to notice this special meaning of the German word is easily understood; for the word is rarely used in this sense in literature, very frequently, however, in the ordinary conversation of the business man, the politician, the financier. Professor Ebbinghaus, being fond of impressive language, used the word in its conversational sense when he called his method of making the subject conjecture the words omitted from a text, the "Combinationsmethode." The English "combination method" is as little a translation of the German "Combinationsmethode" as the English "school knaves" would be a translation of the German "Schulknaben," that is, schoolboys. I have both in writing and orally used the term "conjectural method" as the equivalent of "Combinationsmethode"; and, since in my opinion this is the nearest approach in English to what Professor Ebbinghaus actually meant, I recommend its use to my fellow psychologists. He might have used in German, too, the phrase "Conjecturmethode," but, obviously, did not use this because it is rarely used in German outside the circles of the philologists, whereas the phrase "Combinationsmethode" immediately appeals to the public at large.

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